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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

(NOT FOR PUBLICATION)

Subject: "Casseroles and Baking Dishes." Information approved by the Bureau of Home Economics, U.S.D.A.

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The little bride from across the street dropped in the other morning on her way to town.

"If you're not too busy, Aunt Sammy," said she, "I wish you'd go shopping with me. I want to buy some things for my kitchen, among them a casserole. When I stocked up with kitchen equipment I wasn't so wise as I am today and somehow I never thought about casseroles. Dear me, how I have needed one. So many baked dishes Bill and I have had to go without just because I didn't have the proper thing to cook them in."

"Might a mere man inquire," said Uncle Ebenezer, "what this word casserole means? I'll bet it's one of those fancy words you women like to use to make a common everyday article sound like something special."

"A casserole is a covered baking dish," replied the little bride. "The word is just one of those convenient cooking terms we Americans borrowed from the French. You're a tease, Uncle Ebenezer. You know I'm not trying to be fancy in my language. Isn't it more convenient to say 'casserole' than to say covered baking dish every time? Anyway, let me tell you that a casserole is a convenient dish to have in the kitchen. You can use it, you see, both with and without the cover. Without the cover, you can cook in it any of the baked dishes that would be cooked in a plain, everyday, open baking dish."

By that time I had my hat and coat on and we started off in search of casseroles,

As we went down the street my little friend said, "I was just thinking, just counting up in my mind all the different dishes I can make when I have that casserole. Of course, a plain open baking dish would cost less. But I think a casserole is more economical in the end since it can be used both as an open baking dish and again for foods that need to be cooked with the lid on. Let's see. There are the true casserole dishes, done with the cover on--casserole of chicken, as in the green cookbook, casserole meat combinations, baked beets and other baked vegetables. Without the lid, the dish can be used for chicken or meat pies, all scalloped dishes, souffles, macaroni and spaghetti dishes, and then many different baked desserts-- baked custards, fruit Bettys and so on. Isn't that quite a list for one dish to boast of?"



"And," I added, "there are some economy reasons for using a casserole. Meats, vegetables and fruits cooked in covered dishes in the oven need very little water and none of their nourishing juices are wasted. Used as a baking dish without the cover, your casserole will help with the left-overs. Left-over odds and ends can be made attractive and delicious, by scalloping or creaming and then baking in the oven."

In the stores we found an array of baking dishes of all kinds--large and small expensive and inexpensive, fancy and plain. There were casseroles made of glass--oven glass, of course. And others made of earthenware. Then there were some of enamelware to set in a serving frame or container. There were also some bright aluminum ones.

The little bride declared that her tastes ran to simple things these thrifty days, so she bought one of the simple, substantial, inexpensive dishes. It was made of vitrified earthenware, brown on the outside and white on the inside. And it was large enough to serve four people. "In case of company," she said. She also bought some ramekins to match.

"Another new word," said Uncle Ebenezer, when we told him about these last purchases, "I'd like to ask now what ramekins are."

Ramekins, as the little bride explained, are little individual baking dishes that just hold enough for one person. Usually they have no covers as casseroles do. They're very convenient for a family of two or three or wherever individual service is used. They come in handy for baking and serving any creamed mixture covered with crumbs. A little baking dish full of steaming hot baked food also makes an invalid's tray look tempting. There's something about a nice baking dish, you know--large or small, covered or uncovered, that makes the everyday foods look dressed up and especially inviting.

Now for some points on buying baking dishes. You need to use care in selecting these just as you do in choosing any other piece of household equipment.

After the two of us had looked over all the casseroles in stock the other day and considered each different kind, we decided on some questions that every housewife would do well to ask before she pays her money for a casserole.

First, is the dish ovenproof, does it hold heat well and is it suitable for serving on the table as well as for baking?

Second, is it well-balanced and handy to use?

Third, how about the handles? Are they well-placed, sturdy and dependable?

Fourth, are the surfaces smooth, non-absorbent and easily cleaned?

Fifth, does the cover fit well?

Sixth, does the dish stand firmly on a flat bottom and not wobble in the least?

Seventh, will it conveniently fit into your oven space with other utensils likely to be used at the same time? This is especially important if your oven is small.

And, eighth, is the cost justified by the number of purposes it will serve?

Lots of points, you see, to ask yourself when buying a new casserole. But that's the way to get your money's worth.

Another way to get your money's worth is to make this article last a lifetime and give good service. The care you give it is most important.

In the first place, it's well to understand that ovenware is meant to be used in the oven, not on top of the stove or next to a flame. This brings too high a heat in one place.

Another point in the care of a casserole, particularly a glass or earthenware one, is never to subject it to sudden changes in temperature. Be careful not to pour cold water into the hot dish or to place the hot dish on a wet table or in cooler water. Many a handsome casserole has been cracked and broken in just these ways.

If it's difficult to get the casserole clean during dishwashing, because the food sticks, fill the dish with warm water and a dash of washing powder and soak it for several hours. Fine steel wool will help remove food that has browned on. But you can avoid a lot of this trouble, by always greasing the baking dish before food is put in to bake.

When I told the Menu Specialist that we were going to talk about casserole cooking today, she said she would plan a casserole meal. With economy in mind, she planned ham en casserole for the main dish. According to market reports, hog prices are lower than they have been in thirty years. Following the low price on hogs, fresh pork and cured pork have dropped in price. So this is a good time to use ham.

Here's the menu: Ham en casserole; Baked beets; Buttered green cabbage; and, for dessert, Fresh pineapple and grapefruit cup and Quick coffee cake, served hot. Coffee served with the dessert.

Now here's the way to fix ham en casserole.

Place a thick slice of ham in a baking dish. Add thinly sliced raw potatoes which have been sprinkled lightly with flour. Pour over them enough milk to cover. Put the lid on the dish and bake slowly for about an hour and a half--or until the potatoes and ham are thoroughly cooked. The salt and fat of the ham are sufficient to season the potatoes. If necessary, add a little milk from time to time during cooking. Toward the end of the baking, remove the lid from the dish and let the potatoes brown on top. Serve in the baking dish.

If the ham is very salty, it is best to soak it before cooking it with the potatoes. The Recipe Lady suggests soaking it in buttermilk or sour milk, since the acid seems to soften the ham and make it more tender when cooked.

As I said, this casserole dish takes about an hour and a half to bake. So we have planned the baked beets another casserole dish to go with it since they also require a long baking time. This menu requires two casseroles--two

covered dishes. Since the potatoes in the ham casserole are sliced, the Menu Specialist suggests that the beets be diced before baking, to give variety to the meal.

You'll find the recipe for baking beets in the bulletin called "Food for Children". There's a new edition just out. The number of the bulletin? Sixteen seventy-four. A copy is yours for the asking whether you order by name or number.

MONDAY - Another saving day chat.

